



### AARON JOHNSON JR.

Aaron Johnson Jr. was born May 22, 1850 at Council Bluffs, Iowa, to Aaron Johnson Sr. and his first plural wife, Jane Scott Johnson. When Aaron Jr. was three weeks only his father was chosen as captain of 135 wagons which were headed across the plains to the Salt Lake Basin. After a tedious journey, the wagons arrived at their destination on September 1, 1850. Captain Johnson was selected, along with William Miller, to travel south to Utah Valley for the purpose of locating a suitable area for settlement. Hobble Creek was a promising site and by September 18, the families entered the domain of their new home. Captain Johnson later suggested the name Springville as a fitting title for the town.

Aaron Jr. spent his childhood in the usual manner except for his strange attraction to water. He was nearly drowned three times. The most serious incidents occurred in Hobble Creek during the high water spring thaw, and the other was a result of tempting fate when he skated too close to a black hole on Utah Lake and broke through the thin ice. Having survived these ordeals, Aaron Jr. left home at 14 to become a teamster. Through the next few years he traveled the plains and mountains for a freight company where he experienced brief encounters with mountain men, Indians, ruffians and many other "Old West" characters. His most memorable encounter as a youngster was with none other than Jim Bridger, who spoke to the lad as they passed on a narrow wilderness trail.

After he retired from the freighting business, Aaron married Louisa Melatea (or Meletiah) Whiting on October 8, 1871 at the Endowment House. They became the parents of 10 children: Aaron Wayne, Winnifred, Claudia, Willis Kelsey, Frank Milton, Elmer, Hugh Dougall, Louis A., Leland and Bryan. Early in 1876, Aaron took his wife and two children, along with several other families, and left Springville to colonize the Little Colorado River. The group of settlers stayed in Arizona only three months before they returned to Utah. They were defeated by the formidable desert. During the journey home, tragedy struck when Winnifred died of spinal meningitis. Aaron and Louisa were heartbroken as they

buried their two-year old daughter at Lee's Ferry.

In 1882, Don C. Johnson, Aaron, Mose and Stephen, built a theatre in Springville. It stood where the first Springville library was built. There, under the tutelage of Mr. S. S. Hamil, Aaron Jr. began his long career as an elocutionist and actor. He was devoted to the profession for more than 40 years. His life reads like "Gulliver's Travels" as he journeyed through Utah towns presenting a variety of plays and teaching elocution lessons. He often selected his most proficient students to take part in plays. The play was then advertised and presented to the public. The people enthusiastically attended the productions because entertainment was scarce and the Johnson Drama Co. were real professionals for their era. The large attendance at plays such as: "Two Orphans," "Uncle Tom's Cabin," "Jack of Diamonds," "Enoch Arden," and "Above the Clouds," made Aaron's time both profitable and satisfying.

In 1886, Aaron moved his family to Union Bench where he built a three room brick home. Seven years later he bought a piece of land across the street from the Mapleton church where he built a larger home. During his years in Mapleton, numerous plays were performed for local residents in the Wallace Johnson Hall. Aaron worked as a building contractor when he wasn't involved in theatrical productions. He was also active politically and served as the first justice of the peace of the Mapleton Precinct.

In about 1900, Aaron moved all but the married members of his family to Raymond, Alberta Canada to homestead and farm. Three years later they moved to Taber where Aaron served as postmaster and delegate to the Canadian Legislature. He also continued the popular theatrical tours. In 1908, he returned to Mapleton. He remained only for a few years and moved again to the Uintah Basin where he bought a farm at Altonah. There he became justice of the peace and editor of a newspaper. Finally the tireless traveller returned to Mapleton where he died of a chronic heart ailment on May 4, 1927. He was eulogized and remembered for his humor and great theatrical talents.